

NOTE: This proclamation will be published in the *Federal Register* on October 14.

Remarks Following a Meeting With President Ivan Gasparovic of Slovakia

October 9, 2008

President Bush. It is my honor to welcome the President of Slovakia to the Oval Office. Slovakia is an ally and friend of the United States. And in my time as President, I have come to admire this President. He's an easy man to talk to. He's got good, strong opinions, and I appreciate his values.

We talked about a variety of subjects. I assured him that the United States will take strong action in dealing with the current economic situation. And I also talked about our common desire to have a—to work with our European friends to develop as best as possible common policy.

During my Presidency, I was pleased to support Slovakia's ascension into NATO. I was confident that Slovakia would be an excellent partner and ally in NATO, and history has proven me correct. And I thank the people of Slovakia for supporting the Government's decision to deploy troops into Afghanistan to help that young democracy never again be a safe haven for terrorists, and to serve as an example of the transformative power of freedom.

Finally, we talked about visa waiver. I told the President that Slovakia has made a lot of progress on visa waiver. And I expect that in mid-November there will be a—you know, a positive decision for the people of your good country, Mr. President. And I congratulate you and your foreign ministry for working hard on this issue. And I'm glad to welcome you to the Oval Office.

President Gasparovic. Mr. President, allow me to start by thanking you for inviting me. This is an extraordinary day for me. And I believe it is also a satisfaction to the people of Slovakia for them to see that Slovakia has a favorable disposition towards our country, and that we have good relations. I believe that in the history of our relations, we are currently at our highest point.

It was during his Presidency that President Bush supported Slovakia on its way to NATO, which in turn, helped Slovakia to become a member of the European Union. These were two very important steps and decisions that allowed Slovakia to build its reputation as a credible country. And it is this credibility that allows Slovakia to attract foreign investment into our country. Slovakia continues to be a prosperous country and a country that has and maintains its credibility in foreign policy as well.

We talked about many difficult issues. We talked also about the financial crisis and about the steps that need to be taken in order to overcome this crisis and to reinvigorate the financial system.

I'm very glad that Slovakia and its economy is currently in a situation where we will not likely be taking a direct hit from this financial crisis. Slovakia is in a position where we're able to mitigate many impacts of this crisis. On the other hand, Slovakia is the world's largest per capita car producer. This means that Slovakia's exports and foreign trade will suffer. However, we believe that we can take steps to mitigate this impact.

I was glad that in my capacity as the President of the Slovak Republic, I was able to reassure the President that Slovakia will continue to stand behind its commitments and its dedication to NATO, and that we will continue to be present in Afghanistan. Moreover, Slovakia will increase the number of troops deployed to Afghanistan by 100 percent.

In closing, I want to say that I believe, Mr. President, our meeting today was a very strong message of the good relations that Slovakia has with the United States, and vice versa.

I believe that this will continue——

President Bush. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:16 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. President Gasparovic spoke in Slovak, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks at a Reception Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month

October 9, 2008

Hola! Sientese. Bienvenidos a la Casa Blanca. [Laughter] Este es el ultimo “Mes de la Hispanidad” que paso como presidente—y por eso, le dije a mi personal que hoy queria hablarles solo en espanol. Me contestaron: “Senor presidente, antes de dar un discurso en espanol, por que no llega primero a dominar el ingles?” [Laughter]

I am proud to be with you. I am proud to be with current and former Latino members of my administration. I want to thank the ambassadors from the diplomatic corps for joining us today. We're proud to be your friends. I want to thank the members of the United States Armed Forces who have joined us. I want to thank my friend Emilio Estefan, president of Estefan Enterprises. And I want to thank Andres Cabas from Colombia, who is going to sing a couple of songs for us. Thank you and your band for joining us.

Every year at this time, we recognize the great contributions Hispanic Americans make to our country—and we should. From coast to coast, people of Hispanic descent enrich our culture and make our Nation a better place. They serve in top positions throughout business and government. They bring their strong values of faith and family to our communities. My family is proud to have Latino blood—*mi cunada*. Jeb and I both married very well. [Laughter] Hispanic Americans cherish the limitless promise of our Nation. During the past 8 years, I've been proud to work with you to ensure *que todos puedan alcanzar las promesas de los Estados Unidos*.

One promise is good education. I mean, you can't have a hopeful nation unless you've got a good education system. And so we worked with Congress to pass the No Child Left Behind Act. This act raises standards and accountability across schools in the country, and I'm pleased to report Hispanic students are scoring at alltime highs on tests, and therefore, an achievement gap is narrowing.

For hundreds of thousands of Hispanic children, the best hope for good education is found in America's faith-based schools.

Earlier this year, I proposed a new program called Pell Grants for Kids, which would help low-income children in underperforming public schools attend a private, a parochial, or out-of-district public school of their choice.

Earlier this year, I met a very interesting young woman at the White House Summit on the Inner-City Children and Faith-Based Schools. The whole purpose was to help these schools realize a comeback and make sure our communities were able to have these schools as a part of their future. The woman I met is a woman named Katrina [Karina]^{*} Ramirez. She grew up in Chicago neighborhood. It was plagued by gang violence, and she had a tough time in school because she didn't speak English. But at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, Karina received a top-notch education. She received real work experience, and she got herself a ticket to college. Karina says, “My dad went from garbage picking in Mexico to having a daughter going to Georgetown.” Karina, thank you for coming. She is proof that *el Sueno Americano es para todos*.

Economic opportunity is a promise of our country. And the truth of the matter is, for generations people have found opportunities in this country that would have been impossible in the places where they were born, and that has made us a vibrant country, and it's encouraged entrepreneurship. Today, the economy, obviously, is going through a very tough stretch, and that's why the administration will work with Congress to pass a financial rescue plan.

The goal of this plan is to free up the flow of capital to help all Americans get the capital and loans necessary to help weather these difficult times. Part of the plan is to free up capital for small businesses. After all, small businesses are the backbone of our economy, and interestingly enough, according to the most recent data, more than 1.5 million small businesses are owned by Hispanic owners.

In times of economic uncertainty, we need to be promoting free trade, particularly with friends in our neighborhood. During my time as President, we've opened up trade agreements with a lot of nations, including nations

^{*} White House correction.